

Lewis Spence

Lewis Spence	
Born	25 November 1874 Angus, Scotland
Died	3 March 1955 (aged 80)
Occupation	journalist, folklorist, occult scholar
Nationality	Scottish
Subjects	Scottish folklore, old British mythology, Atlantis

James Lewis Thomas Chalmers Spence (25 November 1874 – 3 March 1955) was a Scottish journalist, whose efforts as a compiler of Scottish folklore have proved more durable^[1] than his efforts as a poet and occult scholar.^[2]

Biography

After graduating from Edinburgh University he pursued a career in journalism. In 1899 he married Helen Bruce. He was an editor at *The Scotsman* 1899-1906, editor of *The Edinburgh Magazine* for a year, 1904–05, then an editor at *The British Weekly*, 1906-09. In this time his interest was sparked in the myth and folklore of Mexico and Central America, resulting in his popularisation of the Mayan Popul Vuh, the sacred book of the Quiché Mayas (1908). He compiled *A Dictionary of Mythology* (1910 and numerous additional volumes).

Turning his interest closer to home, he investigated Scottish folklore. An ardent Scottish Nationalist, he unsuccessfully contested a parliamentary seat for Midlothian and Peebles Northern at a by-election in 1929. He also wrote poetry, collected in 1953. He wrote about Brythonic rites and traditions in *Mysteries of Celtic Britain* (1905). In this book, Spence theorized that the original Britons were descendants of a people that migrated from Northwest Africa and were probably related to the Berbers and the Basques.^{[3][4]}

Spence's researches into the mythology and culture of the New World, together with his examination of the cultures of western Europe and north-west Africa, led him almost inevitably to the question of Atlantis. During the 1920s he published a series of books which sought to rescue the topic from the occultists who had more or less brought it into disrepute. These works, amongst which were *The Problem of Atlantis* (1924) and *History of Atlantis* (1927), continued the line of research inaugurated by Ignatius Donnelly and looked at the lost island as a Bronze Age civilization, that formed a cultural link with the New World, which he invoked through examples he found of striking parallels between the early civilizations of the Old and New Worlds: the historian of science George Sarton remarked, in reviewing Spence's *Introduction to Mythology* in 1921, "Prof. Smith, it may be recalled, is the chief supporter of the pan-Egyptian theory; he finds traces of Egyptian influence everywhere, even in America".^[5] Spence's erudition and the width of his reading, his industry and imagination were all impressive; yet the conclusions he reached, avoiding peer-reviewed journals,^[6] have been almost universally rejected by mainstream scholarship. His popularisations met stiff criticism in professional journals, but his continued appeal among theory hobbyists is summed up by a reviewer of *The Problem of Atlantis* (1924) in *The Geographical Journal*: "Mr. Spence is an industrious writer, and, even if he fails to convince, has done service in marshalling the evidence and has produced an entertaining volume which is well worth reading."^[7] Nevertheless, he seems to have had some influence upon the ideas of controversial author Immanuel Velikovsky, and as his books have come into the public domain, they have been successfully reprinted and some have been scanned for the Internet, for the enjoyment of new generations willing to suspend critical disbelief.

Spence's 1940 book *Occult Causes of the Present War* (ISBN 0766100510) seems to have been the first book in the field of Nazi occultism.

Over his long career, he published more than forty books, many of which remain in print to this day. Spence was also the founder of the Scottish National Movement which later merged to form the National Party of Scotland and which in turn merged to form the Scottish National Party.

Selected works

Ancient Britain

- *The Mysteries of Britain: Secret Rites and Traditions of Ancient Britain Restored*, (1905, reprinted 1994) London: Senate. ISBN 1-85958-057-2
- *The Magic Arts in Celtic Britain*, (1949, Reprint 1999) Dover Publications, ISBN 0-486-40447-1
- *Celtic Spells and Charms*, (Reprint 2005) Kessinger Publishing ISBN 1-4253-1046-X
- *The History and Origins of Druidism*, 1949

Occult

- *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism: A compendium of information on the occult sciences, occult personalities, psychic science, magic, demonology, spiritism and mysticism*, (1920, Reprinted 2003) Dover Publications, ISBN 0-486-42613-0
- *Occult Causes of the Present War*, (1940, Reprint 1997) Kessinger Publishing, ISBN 0-7661-0051-0
- *Second Sight: Its History and Origins*, Rider 1951

Atlantis and other lost worlds

- *The Problem of Atlantis, London, 1924*^[8]
- *Atlantis in America*, London: Ernest Benn, 1925
- *The History of Atlantis* (1927, Reprinted 1995) Adventures Unlimited Press, ISBN 0-932813-28-3
- *The Occult Sciences in Atlantis*, (Reprinted 1976) Mokelumne Hill Press, ISBN 0-7873-1292-4
- *The Atlantis of Plato*
- *The Evidence For Lemuria From Myth And Magic*
- *The Problem of Lemuria: The Sunken Continent of the Pacific*, London: Rider & Co., 1932^[9]

Mythology

- *The Popul Vuh: The Mythic and Heroic Sagas of the Kiches of Central America*, London, David Nutt, 1908
- *A Dictionary of Mythology*, 1910
- *The Myths of Mexico and Peru* (1914, Reprinted 1976) Longwood, ISBN 0-89341-031-4
- *The Myths of the North American Indians*, London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1914
- *Myths and Legends of Babylonia and Assyria* (New York:Stokes) 1917; (Reprint 1997) Kessinger Publishing, ISBN 1-56459-500-5^[10]
- *The Legends and Romances of Spain* ca. 1920
- *An Introduction to Mythology* George G. Harrap & Co., 1921
- *The Gods of Mexico*, Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1923
- *The Mysteries of Egypt, or, The Secret Rites and Traditions of the Nile*, 1929
- *The Magic and Mysteries of Mexico*, 1932
- *Legends and Romances of Brittany*, 1917
- *The Minor Traditions of British Mythology*, 1948, London: Rider & Co ISBN 9990009015, Reprinted 1972, Benjamin Blom, Inc ISBN 0-405-08989-9
- *The Outlines of Mythology*, 1944
- *British Fairy Origins: The Genesis and Development of Fairy Legends in British Tradition*, London: Watts & Co., 1946
- *Fairy Tradition in Britain*, (1948, Reprint 1997) Kessinger Publishing ISBN 1-56459-516-1
- *Hero Tales and Legends of the Rhine*

- *Ancient Egyptian Myths and Legends*, (Reprint 1990) Dover, ISBN 0-486-26525-0
- *Scottish Ghosts and Goblins*, 1952

Poetry

- *Collected Poems of Lewis Spence*, 1953

Notes & References

- [1] Spence was a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, and Vice-President of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society.
- [2] Brief details of his career are available in the introduction to the 1997 reprint of *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism* (on-line text (http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/s/spence_lewis.html)).
- [3] *The Mysteries of Britain*, Lewis Spence, Health Research Books, 1996, p. 21
- [4] More nuanced recent views, based on early DNA research, are presented by the Oxford geneticist Bryan Sykes, in *Blood of the Isles*, 2006.
- [5] Sarton in *Isis* 4.2 (October 1921:378-380). This is clearly a reference to Grafton Elliot Smith and not to Lewis Spence
- [6] Spence wrote reviews of popularizations of mythology and folklore for *Folklore*, however.
- [7] R.N.R.B. in *The Geographical Journal* 64.2 (August 1924:181-182).
- [8] The reviewer R.N.R.B. in *The Geographical Journal* 64.2 (August 1924:181-182) remarked that "in reading this book one cannot help feeling that the author believes more than the evidence warrants" and that "he is rash in stating that there is proof that Greenland has moved 2500 yards in forty years."
- [9] The reviewer O.R. in *The Geographical Journal* 81.2 (February 1933:181-182) found Spence's evidences well marshalled and noted that biological and geological evidences were set aside as conflicting with Spence's view that a fair-complexioned race "remarkable chiefly for their arcane knowledge and their prowess as builders" inhabited now-sunken lands of the Pacific; the reviewer notes Spence's lack of bibliography and casual references to books whose titles he rarely offers.
- [10] "A readable popular account" began the reviewer in *The Biblical World*, (51.2 [February 1918: 112-113]) who found its breezy attempt to "contain the pure gold of Babylonian romance freed from the darker ore of antiquarian research", in Spence's words, a camouflage for Spence's "totally inadequate preparation."

External links

- Works by Lewis Spence (<http://www.gutenberg.org/author/Lewis+Spence>) at Project Gutenberg
- *Myths and Legends of Babylonia and Assyria* (<http://wisdomlib.org/mesopotamian/book/myths-and-legends-of-babylonia-and-assyria/index.html>)
- *Excerpts from The Popul Vuh* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/pvuheng.htm>)
- *The Legends and Romances of Spain* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/lrs/index.htm>)
- *Hero Tales and Legends of the Rhine* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/lr/index.htm>)
- *Myths of Mexico and Peru* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/mmp/index.htm>)
- *Legends and Romances of Brittany* (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/lrb/index.htm>)

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